
An Australian scientist writing in the British Medical Journal thinks Father Christmas is a bad role model for children because he is very fat and drinks too much alcohol. Janet Barrie reports:

Father Christmas should **get off his sleigh** and walk, **lay off** the mince pies and **go easy on** the beer and brandy, says research from the University of Monash in Melbourne. Santa Claus, it says, is one of the most widely recognised figures in the world, and it's about time he started looking after his health, because he's **a terrible role model**.

The traditional image of him as a jolly little man with a fat **belly** promotes the view that **obese** people are happy. The research isn't intended entirely seriously says Nathan Grills, the scientist behind it, but there's still a good point to make about public health.

Equally worrying he says is the vast amount of alcohol Santa consumes **on his rounds**. All the beer, brandy and sherry left out for him in a billion homes worldwide, it says, must mean **he's in no fit state** to drive his sleigh. In fact, says the research, he should abandon it altogether and find a healthier way to deliver presents - like jogging. If that wasn't bad enough, the study says Santa's habits **warrant closer scrutiny**. More research is needed, it says, before it pronounces him a true public health **menace**.

Janet Barrie, BBC News

Vocabulary and definitions

get off his sleigh	stop using his sleigh (a sleigh is a kind of basic transport, pulled by Arctic animals, reindeer)
lay off	stop doing something (here, eating)
go easy on	not do something (here, drinking alcohol) as much as he usually does
a terrible role model	not a very good example for people (here, young children)
belly	(informal) stomach
obese	very fat
on his rounds	on the route (going from house to house around the world) which Santa makes each year
he's in no fit state	he is not capable or fit to do something
warrant closer scrutiny	should be examined in more detail
menace	threat or danger

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7152054.stm>

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